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SIDNEY LANIER AS REVEALED IN HIS LETTERS.

NOT unnoticed during his life, and not neglected since his death, it is only within the last few years that Sidney Lanier has begun to be adequately appreciated. His fame seems to be upon a crescendo wave—to adopt one of his own characteristic mannerisms—that has not yet reached its highest point. Beginning in 1889, when a bust of him was unveiled and memorial exercises were held in his honor at Johns Hopkins, its progress has been marked by an increasing notice in the various periodicals, some of them publishing articles and poems of Lanier accepted during his lifetime; by growing fame abroad, where he is ranked higher than at home; by the excellent “Select Poems” edited by Dr. Morgan Callaway, Jr.; and by a new edition of all his works brought out in the last two years by his publishers, Messrs. Charles Scribner’s Sons.

In view of the mass of criticism that has already been published, and of the fact that it is yet too soon to make a final judgment, it would seem an inopportune time for further discussion of Lanier; but what has gone before shows the timeliness of the subject and also furnishes occasion for another review, while its true justification is found in the new light thrown upon the man and his work by the recent publication of his letters.

Far more than is usually the case the man and his work were one, and must be judged together, his poems reflecting his life, and his life being a true poem. So that the new view obtained through the letters is not only essential to a proper estimate of the man, but of his work as well. This task is too great for a single article, and, reserving the consideration of the work to a possible later opportunity, we shall consider now only the letters themselves and the revelation they make of the man as he lived and wrote.

The “Letters of Sidney Lanier,” selected and edited by

his son, Mr. Henry Wysham Lanier, and published in 1899 by the Scribners, is an admirably edited volume which is sure to fascinate, if not the general reader, at least any one who is interested in music and poetry, or in heroism displayed in the homely tragedy of poverty and suffering. We must praise especially the arrangement in groups rather than in chronological order. Though this sometimes obscures the relationship of letters on the same subject and of approximate dates, the advantages which it gains far outweigh this defect; for it gives each group the value of a little story, with an underlying unity and its own characteristic qualities. And nothing shows better the skill of the writer than the complete difference in style and tone of the different series.

The letters to Mr. Gibson Peacock,¹ with an introduction by Mr. William R. Thayer, unfortunately somewhat condensed as compared with its original form when the letters were first published, form a natural beginning, giving the outline of Lanier's earlier life, and covering all his literary life in the letters. They are concerned with the homelier side of that life, giving details of illness, finance, and poverty. After the friendship is fully formed, their tone is that of a young man to an old and dearly loved benefactor, something that may rightly be called filial. The style is exceedingly simple.

The letters between two poets, first published in *Scribner's Magazine* of last year, are unique in giving both sides of the correspondence, in the fact that both of the writers are poets, and in the nevertheless world-wide difference between them which the correspondence reveals. Though there is a gradual growth of friendship, and indeed of intimacy, shown in the letters, they are concerned throughout chiefly with the literary side of the two writers, and one feels that there is not the personal interest found in the former series. The style is much freer and more literary, and at least to that extent less simple. Another thing sure to be

¹ First published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for July and August, 1894.

noted is the contrast in the style of the two writers. Again and again, in passing from Taylor to Lanier, one feels that one is passing from prose to poetry. Perhaps the most notable instance of this is Mr. Taylor's letter of September 25, 1875, and Lanier's reply of the 29th.¹ Taylor writes simply that he has been moving, will live in two blocks of Lanier's hotel, and hopes he will accompany him to the Century Club if his health does not prevent. Lanier replies:

My Dear Mr. Taylor: Your note comes flushed with good news. For bringing me within two blocks of you I will, in the most sublime manner, forgive Fate a dozen heinous injuries.

I will eagerly await you on Friday evening, and will be delighted to go with you to the Century Club.

I write in the greatest haste, to-day not being long enough by some six hours for what I have to do before it ends.

Which makes me realize how glorious is Friendship, to whose immortality the poor necessities of night and sleep do not exist.

Your friend,

S. L.

The "Letters to a Friend," also between two poets, and edited by the other poet, Mr. Paul Hamilton Hayne, are republished from the *Critic* of February, 1886.² They give us the earliest and latest insight into Lanier's thought, the earliest and latest examples of his style, which, especially in the earlier letters, is more involved and peculiar, while the tone is that of the complete intimacy that springs from entire congeniality.

Turning to the other series, the "Poet's Musical Impressions,"³ there is a total and fascinating change of style. Peculiarities that would be intolerable elsewhere, or in any one in whom they might not be thought natural, the "thou," the "hath," the German inversions, make up a poetic style such as a poet may properly use to his wife, and so attractive as to win the love of any woman. And as showing more clearly the inmost self of the man, it is significant that in thought also this series is the most poetical.

¹ Pages 126, 127.

² February 5, 13; Vol. V., pp. 77, 78, 89-91.

³ Also first published in *Scribner's Magazine* of last year.

The apt criticisms with which the letters abound illustrate Lanier's critical faculty as forcibly as any of his later critical works. Here, for example, is the way he writes of Wagner:

Ah, how they have belied Wagner! I heard Theodore Thomas's orchestra play his "Overture to Tannhauser." The music of the future is surely thy music and my music. Each harmony was a chorus of pure aspirations. The sequences flowed along, one after another, as if all the great and noble deeds of time had formed a procession to march in review before one's ears instead of one's eyes. These "great and noble deeds" were not deeds of war and statesmanship, but majestic victories of inner struggles of a man. This unbroken march of beautiful-bodied triumphs irresistibly invites the soul of a man to create other processions like it. I would I might lead a so magnificent file of glories into heaven.¹

And again:

The conception [of the "Rhein-Gold"] is very fine; but there is something in it, or rather something not in it, which I detect in everything that any German has yet done in the way of music or poetry. I know not exactly what to call it, or indeed how to define it. It is that (if I may express it in a very roundabout way) sentiment lying deep in the heart of the author which would produce on his face a quiet, wise smile all the while he was writing, a sort of consciousness underlying all his enthusiasms (which are not at all weakened thereby) that God has charge, that the world is in his hands, that any littleness is therefore small and unworthy of a poet. This was David's frame of mind; it was also Shakespeare's. No German has approached it, except perhaps Richter.²

His literary criticism is quite as good. As Hayne said, it would be hard to excel this of Browning:

Have you seen Browning's "The Ring and the Book?" I am confident that, at the birth of this man, among all the good fairies who showered him with good endowments, one bad one, as in the old tale, crept in by stealth and gave him a constitutional twist i' the neck whereby his windpipe became, and has ever since remained, a marvelous, tortuous passage. Out of this glottis-labyrinth his words won't and can't come straight. A hitch and a sharp crook in every sentence bring you up with a shock. But what a shock it is! Did you ever see a picture of a lasso in the act of being flung? In a thousand coils and turns, inextricably crooked and involved and whirled, yet, if you mark the noose at the end, you see that it is directly in front of the bison's head, there, and is bound to catch him. That is the way Robert Browning catches you. The first sixty or seventy pages of "The Ring and the Book" are altogether the most doleful reading, in point either of idea or of music, in the English language; and yet the monologue of Giuseppe Capponsacchi, that of Pompilia Comparini, and the two of Guido Franceschini, are unapproachable, in their kind, by any living or dead poet,

¹Page 68. ²Page 106.

me judice. You get lightning glimpses—and, as one naturally expects from lightning, zigzag glimpses—into the intense night of the passion of these souls. It is entirely wonderful and without precedent. The fitful play of Guido's lust, and scorn, and hate, and cowardice closes with a master stroke:

. . . Christ! Maria! God!
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?

Pompilia, mark you, is dead by Guido's own hand; deliberately stabbed because he hated her purity, which all along he has reviled and mocked with the devil's own malignant ingenuity of sarcasm.

That he can be just to all the merit he sees is shown by this compliment to Whitman, the more interesting because of the severe criticism of him elsewhere, and the judgment as to the comparative value of the three books is thoroughly characteristic:

I read through the three volumes on Sunday; and upon a sober comparison I think Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" worth at least a million of "Among My Books" and "Atalanta in Calydon." In the two latter I could not find anything which has not been much better said before; but "Leaves of Grass" was a real refreshment to me—like rude salt spray in your face—in spite of its enormous fundamental error that a thing is good because it is natural, and in spite of the world-wide difference between my own conceptions of art and the author's.¹

Let us now pass to a consideration of the man and of his pathetic life and work. He was born, it will be remembered, at Macon, Ga., February 3, 1842. His father's family was of Huguenot extraction and distinguished in many generations for musical ability; his mother's was likewise gifted in music, poetry, and oratory. All this inheritance, passing over his parents, was concentrated in Lanier.

Of these gifts, music always came first. It is a subject for speculation what Lanier would have become had his bent for music—shown by his skill on any instrument and his violin trances—been unchecked by his father, who taught him that music was an unmanly art and turned him for solace to the flute. He might perhaps have become the greatest American composer and the founder of a new school of music instead of a poet who in his life and work united and interfused the sister arts.

From fourteen to eighteen, with one year's intermission,

¹ Page 208.

he studied at Oglethorpe College, whose equipment was not especially fitted for training such a man or its atmosphere congenial. Yet here is revealed one of Lanier's most marked characteristics. Instead of working only on poetical subjects, spending his time only on what suited his pleasure, or defying the authority of the faculty, as from the example of Poe, Landor, Shelley, and others, one has been led to expect of poets, he made the most of his opportunities, and was graduated with the highest honors.

And this course was not unrewarded. He received a valuable stimulus from Prof. James Woodrow, the man who later came to grief in attempting to reconcile the theory of evolution with the Calvinism of the Presbyterian Church, South, and gained a basis for further study without which all his future work would have been impossible. It is also to be noted that his genius was early recognized. The faculty gave him a tutorship, while his fellow-students, both before and after he took this trying position, looked up to him with respect and seemed to regard him as a being quite apart.¹

During these college days Lanier was already meditating on the respective merits of music and poetry, and trying to decide which he should embrace as a career. He writes in his notebook:²

The point which I wish to settle is merely by what method shall I ascertain what I am fit for, as preliminary to ascertaining God's will with reference to me; or what my inclinations are as preliminary to ascertaining what my capacities are—that is, what I am fit for. I am more than all perplexed by this fact, that the prime inclination—that is, natural bent—(which I have checked, though) of my nature is to music, and for that I have the greatest talent; indeed, not boasting, for God gave it me, I have an extraordinary musical talent, and feel it within me plainly that I could rise as high as any composer. But I cannot bring myself to believe that I was intended for a musician, because it seems so small a business in comparison with other things which, it seems to me, I might do. Question here: "What is the province of music in the economy of the world?"

This extract is also noteworthy as showing that involved,

¹ This I have from the personal testimony of my father, who was at that time a student in a lower class.

² Ward's "Memorial."

unduly emphasized style which was perfectly natural to Lanier and which, intensified later by early English peculiarities, characterized so much of his work in prose as well as in verse.

The next four years of Lanier's life were taken up by the civil war, during which he served constantly in the Confederate army, most of the time in the signal service. Here the important facts are: his refusal to accept a promotion which would separate him from his brother Clifford; his spare time spent in the study of the modern languages and Anglo-Saxon; his devotion to his flute, which he hid in his sleeve when captured on a blockade runner, by which some comforts were earned and the tedium of his prison life at Point Lookout relieved; and the first beginnings of consumption, with which dread disease he was to fight the rest of his life, produced by the hardships of the service and developed by his spending the winter in a Northern prison with nothing but summer clothing to wear.

If any one should regard these as untoward surroundings and a sad fate for a young poet, it should be remembered that it developed and made the man, without which the poet could not have been. How he took them and what he thought of them will be shown abundantly later on.

To this period belong the earliest poems, among which are "The Tournament," "The Wedding," "The Death of Stonewall Jackson," and two translations of Heine's "Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam," and a poem by Herder.

Again it was seen how nature trains a poet, for true it is that a poet is made, not born, only the making is in the hands of God and of the poet himself. The next few years were spent in constant trouble and hardship, and it was not until 1873 that Lanier found himself in a position that permitted the development of his musical and poetic gifts, and not till the next year that his first noticeable success was made. But look closer. During this time the poet's life was full of all that develops a man: the death of his mother; hard work in uncongenial situations, as clerk in a hotel at Montgomery, Ala., as school-teacher at Prattville, as a lawyer in his

father's office at Macon, Ga.; illnesses that brought him more than once to the brink of the grave; courtship and marriage to a woman, Miss Mary Day, of Macon, without whom, taking his testimony as that of the best witness, none of his future work could have been accomplished. Through it all Lanier displayed a clear, comprehensive, and correct judgment of the ordinary affairs of life, a ready sympathy with his surroundings, animate and inanimate, an unswerving steadfastness of will combined with a manly submission to the inevitable and an unfaltering belief in himself and his mission.

The poems of this period include the "Jacquerie" fragment; three "Songs for the Jacquerie," the first of which, apparently an echo from his courtship days, is exquisitely beautiful; most of the unrevised earlier poems, the best being "Strange Jokes," "The Raven Days," "Baby Charley," "Night," "June Dreams in January," and three of the pieces collected under the title "Street Cries," of which the most noteworthy is "Life and Song." "June Dreams in January" is descriptive of Lanier's own experience, in which, unfortunately, he found the transmutation of poetry into gold not so easy as it is represented to be in the poem. "Life and Song" is even more important, as expressing the poet's own ideal of a poet—an ideal he fulfilled in his own life. To this period belong also his first published work, the novel "Tiger Lilies," and various magazine articles, some of which have been recently collected in "Music and Poetry" and "Retrospects and Prospects."

In 1873 Lanier reached the turning point of his life. After a short stay in New York, and an immediate recognition there of his musical genius, he settled at Baltimore as "first flute" in the Peabody Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the great composer and musician, Asger Hamerick. What decided this step can be seen from a letter¹ to his father, in which he says:

As to business, why should I—nay, how *can* I—settle myself down to be a third-rate, struggling lawyer for the balance of my little life, as long as there

¹ Quoted in Ward's "Memorial."

is a certainty almost absolute that I can do some other things so much better? My dear father, think how, for twenty years, through poverty, through pain, through weariness, through sickness, through the uncongenial atmosphere of a farcical college and of a bare army and then of an exacting business life, through all discouragement of being wholly unacquainted with literary people and literary ways; I say, think how, in spite of all these depressing circumstances, and of a thousand more which I could enumerate, these two figures of music and poetry have steadily kept in my heart so that I could not banish them. Does it not seem to you, as to me, that I begin to have the right to enroll myself among the devotees of these two sublime arts, after having followed them so long and so humbly and through so much bitterness?

The chances for further study—and Lanier plunged at once into his favorite study of early English literature—for work, and the cultivation of all his gifts were boundless, but of all these opportunities which the change brought, those that were musical were the most significant. In “Tiger Lilies” Lanier had written:¹ “To make a home out of a household . . . music is the one essential. Late explorers say they have found some nations that have no God; but I have not read of any that had no music. . . . Music means harmony, harmony means love, love means God.” Later he wrote to Hayne, in 1873:² “Whatever turn I have for art is purely musical; poetry being, with me, a mere tangent into which I shoot sometimes. I could play passably on several instruments before I could write legibly, and since then the very deepest of my life has been filled with music, which I have studied and cultivated far more than poetry.”

Poetry remained a tangent until he saw it as a high and noble form of music. This recognition of the relation of poetry and music is the keystone to the arch of all Lanier's life and work. Hence his views on music and his equipment as a musician are of great importance. Of these, for the first time, one is able to judge adequately from the letters to his wife, collected under “A Poet's Musical Impressions.” Here, as throughout the rest of Lanier's life, there

¹ Quoted in Ward's “Memorial.”

² Letter of May 26, “Letters,” p. 236.

is an embarrassment of riches. All the letters are significant, but only a few extracts can be given:

After the second song I was called on to play, and lifted my poor old flute in air with tumultuous, beating heart, for I had no confidence in that or in myself. But *du Himmel!* Thou shouldst have heard mine old love warble herself forth. To my utter astonishment, I was perfect master of the instrument. Is not this most strange? Thou knowest I had never learned it; and thou rememberest what a poor muddle I made at Marietta in playing difficult passages, and I certainly have not practiced; and yet there I commanded and the blessed notes obeyed me, and when I had finished, amid a storm of applause, Herr Thielepape arose and ran to me and grasped my hand, and declared that he "hat never heart de flude accompany itself pefore." I played once more during the evening, and ended with even more rapturous bravos than before, Mr. Scheidemantel grasping my hand this time and thanking me very earnestly.¹

In the letter of December 2, 1873,² Lanier gives a humorous description of his first rehearsal as *Flauto Primo*. It is too long for transcription, but a hint of his experience may be learned from a part of a letter³ to Hayne:

I spent the winter in Baltimore, pursuing music and meditating my "Jacquerie." I was *Flauto Primo* of the Peabody Symphony Orchestra, and God only could express the delight and exultation with which I helped to perform the great works brought out by that organization during the winter. Of course this was a queer place for me, aside from the complete *bouleversement* of going from the courthouse to the footlights. I was a raw player, and a provincial withal, without practice, and guiltless of instruction, for I never had a teacher. To go, under these circumstances, among old professional musicians, and assume a leading part in a large orchestra which was organized expressly to play the most difficult works of the great masters, was (now that it is all over) a piece of temerity that I do not remember ever to have equaled before. But I trusted in love, pure and simple, and was not disappointed; for, as if by miracle, difficulties and discouragements melted away before the fire of a passion for music which grows ever stronger within my heart; and I came out with results more gratifying than it is becoming in me to specify.

Here is another bit of experience worth noting:

Last night I played at another Church concert in New York City, far up town, to a very pleasant audience, with very pleasant testimonials of success. My first piece, a concertine of Briccialdi's, . . . brought down the house in an enthusiastic *encore*, to which I responded with the inevitable

¹ Letter to his wife, from San Antonio, Tex., January 30, 1873.

² "Letters," p. 82.

³ Macon, Ga., May 23, 1874: "Letters," p. 239.

"Blue Bells of Scotland." My last piece was the "Swamp Robin,"¹ which I only ventured as an experiment. 'Twas a curious psychologic study to note how it puzzled most of the audience, and how the few who did get into it began, as it were, to look about them and to say, like a man who has suddenly ridden into a strange and unexpected road, "Heigh, heigh! what's this?" Somebody saith every original writer has to educate his readers gradually to himself. How true this is in New York! Here the people are at once the boldest and the timidest in the world. When the new presents itself here, each one waits for the other one to pronounce decisively. Of course, at first no one speaks; finally, some generous and open heart says, "This is a good thing;" and then straightway all the people join and push the good thing to heaven.

Once give them a start—these singular New Yorkers—and they will go any length.²

In 1874, at Sunnyside, Ga., Lanier wrote his first great poem, "Corn," inspired by such a prosaic fact as the wasting and abandonment of the old red hills of Georgia, due to the "all cotton" craze. it was published in *Lippincott's* the ensuing February, and won instant and encouraging recognition, which made up in quality what it certainly lacked in quantity. Among those thus attracted was Mr. Gibson Peacock, an "old-school" editor of a Philadelphia evening paper, whose appreciative criticism brought a letter from Lanier that started a lasting friendship.

The record of this friendship and of Lanier's life contained in the first group of letters gives a clear view, as Mr Thayer well says, of the "conditions by which an embodied ideal, a poet, so recently found himself beset in this world of ours." It was a friendship that brought such loving sympathy, such practical help, such opportunities, such new acquaintances, that it was all-important in shaping the rest of Lanier's life. Among those whose acquaintance was thus made were Charlotte Cushman, whom Lanier greatly admired, and Bayard Taylor, through whom his entrée into the literary world of New York and the East was completed.

The friendship with Bayard Taylor, for which Lanier said he "always had a longing, but never dared indulge it more than one indulges what one considers only a pet possi-

¹ One of his own compositions.

² November 17, 1873: "Letters," p. 81.

bility," began much as that with Mr. Peacock. This time the latter was the kind friend, and the poem was "The Symphony."

How this poem was written we learn from a letter¹ to Mr. Peacock:

About four days ago a certain poem which I had vaguely ruminated for a week before took hold of me like a real James River ague, and I have been in a mortal shake with the same, day and night, ever since. I call it "The Symphony." I personify each instrument in the orchestra, and make them discuss various deep social questions of the times, in the progress of the music. It is now nearly finished, and I shall be rejoiced thereat, for it verily racks all the bones of my spirit.

It is a study for the "Jacquerie," and, with the exception of the earlier unrevised fragments, is all that we have from Lanier's life work on that theme which was so dear to his heart. Though the poem was warmly praised, there was then, as always, much criticism and question as to the correctness of Lanier's methods. Nothing could be better than the spirit in which he met this, as shown in the confession to his wife, "his dearest self," a confession which he would make to his "less dear self" in feeling only. After showing the inevitableness of disappointment and misunderstanding, he continues: "Have no fears or anxieties for me. All my trials merely go to prove that art has no more pitiless enemy than what is called business. It matters little that I should fail. What signifies a slight check in so great a cause? *Que mon nom soit flétri*, as Danton says, *que la France soit libre*, which I for my part translate: "Though my name perish, my poetry is good poetry and my music is good music; and beauty never dies, and the heart which needs can always find it.'"

For the remainder of his life all of Lanier's experiences expressed themselves naturally in poems, and though many of them were never written out for want of time, those he finished make up a goodly amount of work, wonderful in view of the distractions and hindrances under which he had to labor. Since his poetry is almost entirely subjective, it is

¹ March 24, 1875: "Letters," p. 12.

interesting to trace the connection between the poems and the circumstances under which they were written. This in many cases can be done through the letters, and sometimes light is thrown on the attitude assumed by publishers and critics.

In a letter, July 30, 1875, to Mr. Gibson Peacock, we read: "The next number of *Lippincott's* will contain four sonnets of mine in the Shakespearean meter. I sincerely hope they are going to please you. You will be glad to know that 'The Symphony' meets with continuing favor in various parts of the land." These are the sonnets published under "In Absence." In a letter of August 30, 1875, to Bayard Taylor three numbered sonnets are mentioned which Lanier says "form the beginning of a series which I will probably be writing all my life, knowing no other method of heart's ease for my sense of the pure worshipfulness which dwells in the lady they celebrate." These, as we learn from a later letter, after a careful revision, appear as the last two sonnets of "Acknowledgment," the first two of which Lanier said he thought more of than of anything he had yet done.

These sonnets to Lanier's wife sprang from their enforced separation, which, with some intermissions, lasted from 1873 to the summer of 1876. The other poems that show his love for his wife or the pain of separation are, "My Springs," "Laus Mariæ," and "Special Pleading," of which Lanier wrote that it was the first in which he dared to give himself freedom in his own peculiar style. When all these poems are read together they give one an eager desire to know more of Mrs. Lanier, even while we are pleased with the reticence and skillful omissions in the musical letters which make it difficult of attainment.

The next poem to appear is the sonnet to Charlotte Cushman. In connection with this it is interesting to read the short but touching notice Lanier makes of her death in a letter¹ to Mr. Taylor. The poem mentioned is apparently the one entitled "At First: "

¹ February 27, 1876: "Letters," p. 146.

It has been uphill work with me to struggle against the sense of loss which the departure of my beloved Charlotte Cushman leaves with me. She and you were the only friends among the artists I have ever had, and since she is gone I am as one who has lost the half of his possessions. The passion to which my devotion to her had grown makes it hard when sight and hearing are both become for evermore impossible. To-day, though keenly desirous to rest after a week of great strain, this little poem teased me till it was on paper. I hope you will think it not wholly unworthy. As I read it over now a disagreeable fancy comes that the last two lines of it are somewhat like something of somebody else, and these vague "somes" are intolerable. Pray tell me if this is so.

"Rose Morals; Red" appears in the next letter. In this Taylor criticised the line "Say yea, say yea," as repeating the same sound four times, and suggested a change in the last line to avoid a redundant foot. A reference to the poem shows that the "say yea," which does not repeat the same sound, is retained, but while the last line is not the one Taylor proposed, the redundant foot has been suppressed.

"The Waving of the Corn" passes through several of the letters. Taylor did not like it, and proposed numerous changes, and it is interesting to find that Lanier profited by most of his suggestions without exactly adopting any. The poem was rejected by Dr. Holland for *Scribner's*, but was sent as an experiment—being the first he had tried with them—to *Harper's* and accepted. From another letter we learn that *Lippincott's Magazine* paid Lanier \$300 for his "Psalm of the West." The history of the Centennial Cantata, which Lanier was chosen to write through Mr. Taylor, is given in full in that series of letters. Again, it is interesting to note the use Lanier made of the changes suggested; but in other respects it is too much like ancient history to be entertaining.

In 1876 Lanier's first volume of poems, under the simple title "Poems by S. L.," was published by the Lippincotts. It contained "Corn," "The Symphony," "The Psalm of the West," "In Absence," "Acknowledgment," "Betrayal," "Special Pleading," "To Charlotte Cushman," "Rose Morals," and "To ——— with a Rose," with the "Dedication" to Charlotte Cushman.

But, unfortunately, life was not all poetry to Lanier. The

letters tell also a sad story of uncongenial work, poverty, and suffering. But the work—uncongenial only because it kept him from what he felt to be his mission or from work on his “beloved *Jacquerie*,” for one side of Lanier’s nature was intensely practical—was vigorously done, the poverty uncomplainingly endured, and the suffering met with a combined submission and defiance that was truly heroic. Some of these revelations may be grouped:

I believe I wrote you some time ago that I had been employed to make a book on Florida. I commenced the travels preparatory thereto in April last; the thing immediately began to ramify and expand, until I quickly found I was in for a long and very difficult job; so long and so difficult that, after working day and night for the last three months on the materials I had previously collected, I have just finished the book, and am now up to my ears in proof sheets and wood-cuts, which the publishers are rushing through in order to publish at the earliest possible moment, the book having several features designed to meet the wants of the winter visitors to Florida. It is, in truth, only a kind of spiritualized guidebook.

This it is which has prevented me from writing you. With a nervous employer and a pushing publisher behind me, I have had to work from ten to fourteen hours a day; and the confinement to the desk brought on my old hemorrhages about a month ago, which quite threatened for a time to suspend my work forever on this side of [the] River.¹

Your siren song of the beauties of your island is at once tempting and tantalizing. When you say you “think I would be tempted to come, if I could imagine the enchanting views from this house,” you make me think of that French empress who wondered how the stupid *canaille* could be so obstinate as to starve when such delicious patties could be bought for only five francs apiece. Cushing’s Island, my dear friend, is as impossible to me, in the present state of the poetry market, as a dinner at Very’s was to a chiffonier; all of which I wouldn’t tell you, both because it is personal and because poverty is not a pleasant thing to think about at Cushing’s Island, except for the single controlling reason that I cannot bear your thinking that I could come to you if I would.²

Yours inclosing three dollars came to me safely, and I should immediately have acknowledged it had I not been over head (literally) and ears in a second installment of my India papers, for which the magazine was agonizedly waiting. Possibly you may have seen the January number by this time; and it just occurs to me that if you should read the India article you will be wondering at my talking coolly of strolling about Bombay with a Hindu friend. But Bhima Gandharva (Bhima was the name of the ancient Sanscrit hero, The Son of the Air, and the Gandharva means A Heavenly Musician) is only another name for Imagination, which is certainly the only

¹ Letter to Paul H. Hayne, October 15, 1875, p. 240.

² Letter to Mr. Gibson Peacock, August 10, 1875, p. 18.

Hindu friend I have; and the propriety of the term, as well as the true character of Bhima Gandharva and the insubstantial nature of all adventures recorded as happening to him and myself, is to be fully explained in the end of the last article. I hit upon this expedient, after much tribulation and meditation, in order at once to be able to make something like a narrative that should avoid an arid encyclopedic treatment, and to be perfectly truthful. The only plan was to make it a pure *jeu d'esprit*, and in writing the second paper I have found it of great advantage.¹

This year, 1876, again makes a notable division in Lanier's work. A change that had been gradually going on seems accentuated by a severe illness at Philadelphia, from which he barely recovered sufficiently to leave for Tampa in December, his physician "pronouncing death unless a warm climate was speedily reached." Lanier himself recognized the truth of the warning.

The beginning of the change may be dimly suggested in "Clover;" it is nearly complete in "Evening Song," of which Lanier writes that "it has smitten Mr. R. Shelton McKenzie under the fifth rib," and which, set to music by Dudley Buck as "Sunset," Taylor calls superb; and it is fully seen in the beautiful poems written during his three months' convalescence at Tampa. These are: "From the Flats," "The Mocking Bird," "Tampa Robins," "A Florida Sunday," and "The Bee," while "The Stirrup Cup," of the same date, is an echo of his illness.

One other poem was written at Tampa, "Under the Cedarcroft Chestnuts," which Lanier said was "written with a very full heart. I wanted to say all manner of fair things about you, but I was so intensely afraid of appearing to plaster you, that I finally squeezed all into one line,

'In soul and stature larger than thy kind.'

In the same letter² Lanier makes the following criticism on his "Beethoven," written the preceding year, which again marks the above mentioned change and explains why his work shows such a steady improvement:

I have just seen the "Beethoven" in the *Galaxy*. . . . On seeing the poem in print, I find it faulty: there's too much matter in it; it is like read-

¹ Letter to Mr. Gibson Peacock, December 16, 1875, p. 22.

² March 4, 1877: "Letters," p. 188.

ing the dictionary; the meanings presently become confused, not because of any lack of distinctness in each one, but simply because of the numerous and differing specifications of ideas.

The other poems of this year are: "The Song of the Chattahoochee," "To Richard Wagner," "A Florida Ghost" (the last of the dialect pieces, the "Baptist Revival Hymn" and "First Sight of an Alabama River Steamboat" appearing in the two preceding years), "The Dove," and "The Hard Times in Elfland." Of the last he writes: "I indulged in a hemorrhage immediately after reaching home, which kept me out of the combat for ten days. I then plunged in and brought captive forth a long Christmas poem for *Every Saturday*, an ambitious young weekly of Baltimore." From the draft of "The Dove" inclosed in a later letter¹ we get an opportunity of seeing the improvement wrought in the poem before it was finally published.

The summer of 1877 was spent at Chadd's Ford, Pa. In November Lanier, with his family, removed to Baltimore, and after a brief experience in a flat settled permanently, barring one or two changes of location, to housekeeping. His delight in thus having a home of his own is humorously and withal pathetically expressed in letters written on the same day² to his two friends, which are too long to be given here.

The following years were the fullest, and doubtless the happiest, of Lanier's life. With his salary as first flute, with his magazine writing, with lectures to private classes, and sometimes with aid from relatives and friends, or a loan (always repaid) from Mr. Peacock, he managed to meet his daily expenses, though he found that he "could not make his daily bread by poetry alone."

In 1879, on his birthday, he received an appointment as Lecturer on English Literature at Johns Hopkins University for the ensuing year—a position he had been hoping for ever since President Gilman first broached the subject in 1876.

¹ To Mr. Gibson Peacock, August 7, 1877: "Letters," p. 44.

² January 6, 1878: to Mr. Gibson Peacock, "Letters," p. 49; to Mr. Bayard Taylor, "Letters," p. 205.

The result of this appointment, the two series of lectures published as the "Science of English Verse" and "The English Novel," the latter of which was delivered when his fatal illness, already begun, made it well-nigh impossible, makes us grudge the delay.

The important poems dating from these years are: "The Harlequin of Dreams," "The Revenge of Hamish," "The Marshes of Glynn," "Remonstrance," "The Crystals," "How Love Looked for Hell," "Individuality," and "A Ballad of Trees and the Master." These go far into the depths of life, and also give us some insight into Lanier's religion, which was so much truer and more beautiful than any creed, a pantheism that did not exclude the personality of God and the responsibility of man, both expressed in the lines:

And I am one with all the kinsmen things
That e'er my Father fathered.¹

But none are more touching, and one had almost said more beautiful, than the outline for a poem with which the "Letters" begin:

Are ye so sharp set for the center of the earth, are ye so hungry for the center of things,
O rains and springs and rivers of the mountains?
Towards the center of the earth, towards the very middle of things ye will fall, ye will run, the Center will draw ye, Gravity will drive you and draw you in one;
But the Center ye will not reach, ye will come as near as the plains, watering them in coming so near, and ye will come as near as the bottom of the Ocean, seeing and working many marvels as ye come so near;
But the Center of Things ye will not reach,
O my rivers and rains and springs of the mountains.
Provision is made that ye shall not; ye would be merged, ye could not return.
Nor shall my soul be merged in God, though tending, though tending.

His soul was surely and swiftly tending toward God. Under what conditions he was now working may be seen from his last letter² to Hayne:

I have been wishing to write you a long time, and have thought several letters to you. But I could never tell you the extremity of illness, of pov-

¹ From "A Florida Sunday." ² November 19, 1880: "Letters," p. 243.

erty, and of unceasing work, in which I spent the last three years; and you would need only once to see the weariness with which I crawl to bed after a long day's work—and often a long night's work at the heel of it, and Sundays just as well as other days—in order to find in your heart a full warrant for my silence. It seems incredible that I have printed such an unchristian quantity of matter—all, too, tolerably successful—and earned so little money; and the wife and the four boys, who are so lovely that I would not think a palace good enough for them if I had it, make one's earnings seem less.

But in spite of these pitiful conditions it must have been an unusual despondency that spoke in the letter. For that Lanier was not always unhappy, and how he was wont to bear his trials, is shown in his poem "Opposition," written at this time:

Of fret, of dark, of thorn, of chill,
Complain no more, for these, O heart,
Direct the random of the will,
As rhymes direct the rage of art.
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The dark hath many dear avails;
The dark distils divinest dews;
The dark is rich with nightingales,
With dreams, and with the heavenly muse.
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Of fret, of dark, of thorn, of chill,
Complain thou not, O heart; for these
Bank in the current of the will
To uses, arts, and charities.

Various expedients were vainly tried to find relief, and meanwhile Lanier went on unfalteringly with his work. At last, in the hope of at least a painless death, camp life in North Carolina was tried. There, after long lingering, and when all but his wife were absent—and would he not have wished it so?—the end came.

Lanier's last completed poem, written at a fever temperature of 104°, with eager haste lest it should not be finished, when the hands that penciled the lines had not strength to carry nourishment to the lips and he was trembling on the brink of the great beyond to which he was so soon to cross over, was "Sunrise." Is there not something significant in this? A study of his latest poems shows that to him his death was indeed a sunrise. And was it not, not only to the man, but also to the poet?

W. P. WOOLF.